

Executive Summary

THIS Inquiry set out to establish what sport and cultural programs exist in Western Australia for at-risk youth, and whether access to these is affected by place of residence or by being Indigenous, female or from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) background.

In Perth, the Committee conducted nine public hearings and a briefing with the Clontarf Foundation. The Committee was assisted in determining the characteristics of successful programs by conducting 19 briefings with sport/recreation and arts/culture organisations, participants and experts in Melbourne and New Zealand.

For the purposes of this Inquiry:

Sport refers to sport and recreational activities, including traditional competitive sport and social sport or physical recreation, organised in some way and involving others.

Culture is defined as cultural activity (e.g. participating in arts activities related to music, dance, theatre, visual arts, literature) and also activity related to a group's identity (e.g. customs, traditions and values).

Youth was defined as young people between the ages of 10 and 25 years, although definitions vary among organisations and experts.

At-risk youth were considered to be young people at heightened risk of:

- engaging in negative or dangerous behaviours, such as truancy, self-harm, anti-social behaviour, drug/alcohol abuse, juvenile offending, and disengaging from education, training or employment;
- displaying poor social and communication skills, low self-esteem, emotional instability, suicidal intent;
- being impacted by homelessness, social and/or economic disadvantage, social isolation, family and domestic violence, substance abuse in the home/peer group/community, family transience, unemployment.

While Aboriginal youth at risk of suicide are among the broader cohort of at-risk youth, the Committee did not focus on this group, given the parallel inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide being conducted by the Education and Health Standing Committee.

How can participation in sport and culture build resilience and engagement?

Resilience refers to the ability of individuals to overcome adversity. Perseverance, motivation, hopefulness and the capacity to negotiate for the provision of resources

are traits of resilience. Increasing levels of depression, suicide ideation, anxiety, low self-esteem and self-worth, obesity and stress are partly attributed to a lack of resilience, as are anti-social behaviours and alcohol and drug abuse.

Engagement in youth programs can enhance a young person's resilience by developing an increased sense of autonomy, empowerment and independence.

Specifically, participation in sport and cultural activities can assist young people to develop or enhance some of the protective factors identified as necessary to build resilience. Participation in team sport, for example, develops important life skills such as communication, conflict resolution, self-discipline, trust and problem solving. The use of sport to integrate marginalised groups such as migrant or refugee populations has become more common in Australia in recent years.

While art's impact on resilience is a relatively new area of research, community arts programs have been found to enable participants to make friends, build social networks and/or increase their social empowerment. They can also bring together marginalised groups and people who are not considered at risk.

Studies of the impact of sports programs of arts programs both show that participants are more engaged in learning and achieve better academic results.

Over the past decade, there has been growing recognition in Australia that activity related to a group's identity (e.g. customs, traditions and values) – is fundamental to individual wellbeing and resilience. Activities which establish or maintain Aboriginal people's connections to country, culture and kin develop a positive sense of community and a robust self-identity.

Who participates?

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 44 per cent of young adults (15-24 years) participated in organised sport in the 12 months before being surveyed.

An estimated 60 per cent of all children aged 5 to 14 years participated in at least one organised sport activity outside of school hours. Participation was higher for boys than girls and was lower for single-parent families and where parents were unemployed.

Some surveys show comparable rates of participation between metropolitan and rural youth and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth, however statistics vary.

The participation rate in organised sport for children born in a non-English speaking country is lower than for children born in an English-speaking country.

Adolescent girls have consistently lower levels of participation in physical activity, including in Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) groups.

ABS data shows that 35 per cent of people aged 15 to 24 participated in at least one cultural activity in the 12 months prior to being surveyed.

Regional participation in the arts is on a par with metropolitan, according to an Australia Council survey. The Mission Australia Youth Survey 2015 records Indigenous participation in arts/cultural/music activities as slightly higher than for non-Indigenous.

There is very little data on participation in arts and culture by CaLD communities. An Australia Council survey shows participation as being lower for people whose main language is not English. Young people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to participate, citing cost as the main reason.

Barriers to participation for at-risk youth

The Committee's evidence largely aligned with the literature in identifying four main barriers to participation: socioeconomic factors, geographical, cultural and gender.

Many youth in the at-risk category come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, which can make paying for fees, equipment and uniforms impossible. It can also mean that they have no access to transport.

This is a greater problem for those living in areas with limited facilities and programs, making travel essential. Almost 40 per cent of regional survey respondents in an Australia Council survey found arts activities hard to get to, compared with 23 per cent of metropolitan respondents.

Being Aboriginal or from a CaLD background presents challenges, some linked to socioeconomic status and geographical factors and others to religious or cultural beliefs, language difficulties, cultural misunderstandings and historical trauma.

Statistics show the rate of participation by Indigenous young people in sport and cultural activities as comparable with non-Indigenous youth, but there may be differences in the types of activities undertaken, with more formal structures throwing up barriers to Indigenous youth.

Most research on participation due to gender relates to girls' participation in sport. Australian girls of a low socioeconomic position were found to experience a disproportionately high number of barriers to sports participation.

Girls in ethnic communities were particularly disadvantaged, with household responsibilities often precluding them from extra-curricular activities.

Sources of funding

The Department of Sport and Recreation (DSR) provides the majority of funding to sports programs in WA, paying around \$64 million in grants and subsidies in 2014-15.

Some DSR programs and initiatives relevant to at-risk youth are co-funded by other State Government departments, including WA Police, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support, the Department of Local Government and Communities (DLGC) and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The Department of Education provides support to recreation programs which engage youth in educational settings, and the Department of Health funds some health-focussed programs.

The Federal Government provides significant funding specific organisations (e.g. Clontarf Foundation and Role Models and Leaders Australia Girls Academies). Local government authorities often deliver sports and recreation programs but may need to apply to other funding sources themselves in order to do so. Corporate sponsorship and donations occur to varying degrees.

The majority of arts funding provided by the State Government is allocated to the Department of Culture and the Arts (DCA) for distribution. For 2016-17, about \$29 million was allocated to support the delivery of arts and cultural activities across WA.

There is no DCA funding program which specifically caters for young people. Organisations seeking funds for projects aimed at at-risk youth would need to compete for the three million dollars distributed annually across several grants streams.

DCA contracts CAN (Community Arts Network) to run the Catalyst Community Arts Fund, which provides funding support to community-driven arts and culture activities. In 2015 \$278,498 was distributed to 27 projects, some of which involved at-risk youth.

The Department of Local Government and Communities also provides a reasonable amount of funding to arts groups and one-off projects. Other state government agencies have worked in partnership with the DCA or other groups to deliver programs.

In 2016 a number of WA organisations which provide programs for at-risk youth received four-year funding from the Commonwealth Australia Council for the Arts, including CAN, Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC) and Yirra Yaakin Aboriginal Corporation (theatre group).

Local governments provide small amounts of funding for arts projects or support other organisations. Corporate and philanthropic sponsorship of arts and cultural activities for at-risk youth is limited.

Significant sport and recreation and arts and culture programs in Western Australia

One of the key programs for increasing participation in sport by disadvantaged youth which the DSR administers is the KidSport program, which provides a voucher for up to \$200 to eligible children (5 to 18) who are unable to afford club fees.

There are two major recreation programs for at-risk youth in the metropolitan area – the North West Metro Inclusion Project, and the Communicare Get Active Inclusion Project, which serves the south-eastern suburbs. Both aim to increase the participation of CaLD and Aboriginal youth in sport and recreation and help to transition refugee youth to mainstream clubs.

The Clontarf Foundation’s football academies for Indigenous boys now operate in eight metropolitan schools and in 12 regional schools, and a similar program for Indigenous girls, Role Models and Leaders Australia (RMLA) Girls Academy, operates in one metropolitan and seven regional locations.

The Wirrpanda Foundation also targets Indigenous youth with four programs in selected metropolitan and regional locations, as does Nyoongar Wellbeing and Sports.

A number of programs contain elements of both recreation and culture or identity-building. Youth centre programs fall into this category, with the most prominent being the Police and Community Youth Centres (PCYC), which specifically target juvenile offenders. In the metropolitan area there are PCYCs in Fremantle, Gosnells, Kensington, Midland, Rockingham, Serpentine and Subiaco. There are 12 centres in regional areas.

The programs run at the centres vary. The Stepping Stones program run by Gosnells PCYC has been particularly successful in combining recreation and culture to engage at-risk youth.

In Albany, the Wumbudin Kool-yee-rah Strong and Proud program is an after-school recreation program for Aboriginal youth aged 12 to 16. Outdoor activities are inspired by the six Noongar seasons and include bush survival skills, seed collection skills and cultural heritage.

The Kimberley-based Yiriman Project is one of few cultural programs which targets at-risk youth – in this case Aboriginal. Yiriman has had documented success in helping to change the lives of the troubled young people it takes on country.

Another successful program, running in the Pilbara since 2010, is the Yijala Yala Project, set up by national company BighART. One of its notable creations is the comic book series Neomad, which has taught Aboriginal students scriptwriting, literacy, Photoshop, filmmaking and sound recording skills.

The Aboriginal-led Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company runs workshops for schools which explore questions relating to culture of all kinds (not just Indigenous), and it also has an Indigenous training initiative and cultural leadership initiative.

Other organisations targeting youth are the metropolitan-based FNTS Movement, which provides hip-hop dance and recording opportunities; and Albany’s Open Access

Youth Art Studio, which is based on a similar model to Melbourne’s Artful Dodgers Studio.

Short-term projects are most likely to be the result of funding provided by CAN or by small grants administered by the Department of Local Government and Communities. CAN’s Strong Culture, Strong Community program in Narrogin resulted in the highly successful Noongar Pop Culture project.

Gaps in service provision

There is no system for recording sport and recreation programs across the State, making it impossible to accurately determine gaps in service provision.

However, based on evidence provided to (and sourced by) the Committee:

- there are fewer sport and recreation programs targeting at-risk youth in regional areas than in metropolitan areas;
- there are few if any sports programs which target CaLD youth in regional areas;
- there are more arts and culture programs in regional WA than the metropolitan area, largely due to Aboriginal programs;
- CaLD youth are more likely to be catered for in terms of arts and cultural programs in the metropolitan area than in regional areas;
- programs targeting female participation are rare, although there are a few sports and cultural identity/leadership programs aimed specifically at Aboriginal girls, and some programs cater for CaLD girls in the metropolitan area;
- services for at-risk youth are not evenly distributed within the metropolitan area and across regional Western Australia.

Policy gaps

The Department for Child Protection and Family Support has an At-Risk Youth Strategy but this does not acknowledge the role of sport and the arts in assisting vulnerable young people.

An across-government Youth Strategic Framework called “Our Youth – Our Future”, launched in 2012, was developed in partnership with 14 State Government agencies, led by the Department of Local Government and Communities. The DCA and DSR had input into this.

The strategic approach included “encouraging young people to be active, creative and involved by offering diverse sport, recreation, arts and culture options that adapt to

changing lifestyles". However, the Committee did not receive any evidence in relation to the success or otherwise of the Youth Strategic Framework.

The DSR's policy and strategy documents demonstrate a commitment to the inclusion of marginalised groups, including at-risk youth. In contrast, the DCA does not have any dedicated programs to address youth or youth at risk, and these groups are largely absent from policy documents.

The DCA has been more active in terms of the delivery of Aboriginal cultural programs, proposing (in partnership with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs) that the DCA becomes a member of the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee. The Committee supports this proposal.

At the local government level, a study co-authored by CAN found that only 13 per cent of councils had an overarching strategy or plan for arts and culture.

Information gaps

Data on sport and culture programs available to at-risk youth in WA and statistics revealing who participates is lacking.

Lack of funds to implement research to assess programs contributes to the data void.

Challenges for service providers

Challenges for service providers centred around trying to work in a system which is fragmented, working across a number of government departments, sourcing and securing funding – particularly for longer term projects, demonstrating outcomes, and accommodating participants with different cultural requirements.

With so many different agencies providing funding to so many different organisations, it is not surprising that service provision is somewhat fragmented. This can lead to duplication of services and ineffective use of resources.

Programs funded by more than one department also face challenges in satisfying potentially competing priorities. Arts or sports programs which are not the core business of an agency (for example the Department of Corrective Services) are often the first to be axed when funding is constrained.

Service providers are often required to demonstrate the outcomes of their programs in order to justify further funding. This was seen as necessary to ensure that those targeted were receiving a quality service and to weed out groups that were not delivering good programs.

However, social outcomes are difficult to measure and evaluations are often not conducted rigorously, if at all. While quantitative measures are often used, many saw these as meaningless and advocated for the use of qualitative measures.

Organisations overwhelmingly agreed that funding for longer-term projects, or at least successive funding to continue short-term projects, is necessary to implement meaningful change. Both the DSR and the DCA clearly saw the value of long-term funding but were limited in what they could provide from their budget allocations.

Many organisations survive on a handful of smaller grants from multiple sources. The time consumed in seeking out funding and completing grant applications places considerable strain on organisations.

Increased competition for funding means that quite often smaller, less experienced organisations miss out.

Organisations also had to tread a careful path when providing services to multicultural groups, often acting as the conduit between club volunteers and participants with specific cultural needs or practices. They worked closely with both parties to promote understanding.

Characteristics of successful programs

Successful programs have common factors related to their environments, people and processes that enable them to develop the protective factors necessary for resiliency and engagement.

While some young people are referred to programs, most organisations providing programs need an effective means of engaging young people in the first instance. This could include using sport as a hook to introduce vulnerable youth to other support services; including young people in the development of programs, to ensure their interests and values are being met; and making programs accessible in terms of location (for example, in a park), time of day (for example, late at night) and transport.

Environment

The social environment of a program can significantly influence a young person's transition from disengagement to investment. A supportive and inclusive environment that is non-judgemental, respectful and empathetic will make participants feel welcome. Young people are quick to perceive if a service is not genuine and does not have their best interests at heart.

Programs also need to be prepared to adapt their delivery methods to meet the unique needs of their participants, which might mean adapting a uniform or developing less structured models (for example, discarding weekly practice sessions). In arts programs,

facilitators needed to be prepared to allow the young people to drive the artistic vision so that it was relevant to issues affecting them.

Service providers also needed to have a consistent presence in a community. Regular engagement over a long period of time was required to build a relationship that could have an impact. An organisation which was always there when it said it would be there was often the most consistent thing in a young person's life.

People and relationships

The importance of having the right staff in the right positions was emphasised throughout the Inquiry. While it is impossible to pinpoint the qualities in a youth mentor, program facilitator or coordinator that will make a difference to a young person, it was apparent that participants needed to find someone they could relate to.

All programs using mentoring initiatives recognised that sustained and enduring contact between mentors and mentees was required to generate real change in the lives of young people.

Several organisations emphasised the benefits of an organisation reflecting the composition of the communities it serves. In addition, it is widely acknowledged that to address issues within a specific group or community, that group or community should be intimately involved in the solution.

KALACC noted that culturally embedded services, rather than government-controlled culturally appropriate services, were required if there was to be any impact on suicide rates and juvenile offending in the Kimberley.

Organisations providing services for youth from Aboriginal or CaLD backgrounds noted that buy-in from the community ensured the program had maximum impact. Reversing the process and connecting young people from marginalised groups to the mainstream community also had benefits.

Building relationships with families of participants was also particularly important for programs aimed at young people from Indigenous and CaLD backgrounds.

Processes

The most successful programs had enabled empowerment and capacity-building in participants, either informally or, more often, through formal pathways. Structured, leadership-focused pathways were the most common method of empowering participants. New experiences, skills and responsibilities would be introduced at each stage.

Engagement in school and education is a protective factor contributing to resilience, and hence there is value in aligning programs with primary or secondary schools. This

had led to increased attendance, retention and engagement. Even programs without direct links to schools tended to increase youth engagement with education.

Programs which provide employment pathways are also valuable. Few programs explicitly set out to develop professional artists or sportspeople. However, it was quite common for participants to return to their programs as employees or volunteers, and some organisations actively encouraged this.

In line with the conclusion that sport or culture does not, by and of itself, build resilience, it is important that sport and culture-based programs are linked to other service providers. Collaboration allows organisations to develop programs that they would otherwise be unable to provide.

Sport and culture can aid in the creation of a strong sense of identity, which is a fundamental characteristic of resilience. A common characteristic of successful youth programs was the inclusion of activities that enable youth to connect to their cultures and, in doing so, develop a stronger sense of self-identity.

The connection between culture, identity and resilience was particularly emphasised in relation to Aboriginal youth. According to the DCA, culturally-based programs received inadequate funding from federal and state governments, despite such programs consistently having the strongest outcomes.

Finally, despite the difficulties associated with evaluation of programs, a successful program needs an effective and meaningful way of measuring its success.

In conclusion

Expenditure on sport and culture programs for at-risk youth is regarded by many – including the DSR and the DCA – as an investment. There are long-term savings to be made if a program prevents a young person from homelessness, poor health or entering the juvenile justice system.

However, , preventative or engagement programs do not seem to attract the same level of funding as intervention programs, accessible to youth once they have entered the juvenile justice system.

There is general agreement that sport and culture programs work best if they do not operate in isolation, which means government departments which cater for the various needs of young people need to work together.

But until an agency takes on the practical responsibility of coordinating services and funding for at-risk youth – including integrating sport and culture - this group may remain on the fringes of society.